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# Acknowledgements

This volume entitled, *Quest for Life: A Study in Aharon David Gordon's Philosophy of Man in Nature*, is an investigation into one of the most interesting bodies of Jewish thought in the Modern Period. It is being published in English because of the author's belief that the presentation of Gordon's thought speaks to a great many questions relevant to the English-speaking Jewish world and the broader English-speaking public. These include a re-evaluation of Zionism, the problematic relationship of American Jewry to world Jewry and the State of Israel, as well as the state of humanity in contemporary civilization.

Because of the importance I attach to this work, with respect to the advancement of scholarship and public discourse on matters of Jewish and Humanist import, I am particularly appreciative of the many people who were involved in the various phases of its development and final production.

First and foremost, I'd like to express my deep love and gratitude to my immediate family; to my wife Tzippi, to my children, son- and daughters-in-law, and to my grandchildren, who day-in and day-out make my experience on this Earth a concrete realization of my own *quest for life*.

Next, I'd like to thank my students in the department of Jewish Thought and Philosophy at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, for the quality of challenge, inspiration and enlightenment that they have generated in my life, particularly in recent years. These students join many of my close friends and colleagues, whose dialogue with me on various aspects of Gordon's thought and broader issues in the area of Jewish thought and Western philosophy made the present work possible. I should like to mention specifically Eliezer Schweid, Yehoyada Amir, Shaul Magid, Ari Ackerman, Avi Sagi, Einat Ramon, Yuval Jobani, Jeff Spitzer and Steve Peskoff.

A particular note of thanks goes to Dov Schwartz for his support. It is as a result of my familiarity with, and appreciation of Dov's own scholarly work that I decided to publish this book with the "Emunot" series in Academic Studies Press. A further very special thanks is due to ASP editorial director Alessandra Anzani, and editorial coordinator Stuart Allen for the professionalism, patience, commitment, and care that went into various phases of the book's production.

Finally, I would like to thank the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies for its support through the years and note that this book is being published with the generous help of the Research Fund of the Schechter Institute.

Yossi Turner  
January 2020

## Part I

# **Introduction, Historical and Biographical Background**



## Chapter I

# Introduction

Aharon David Gordon was one of the most interesting and creative Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century. When compared with the more famous Jewish thinkers of that century, such as Herman Cohen, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and Emanuel Levinas, Gordon's unique character and personality become exceedingly obvious. For like these thinkers, Gordon too had a knack for considering contemporary social and cultural challenges together with the loftiest ideas and values. Like them, Gordon's writings reflect a deep and relatively unique understanding of the problems confronting Jewish existence in his time, both in relation to the overall state of humanity and in terms of Jewish anomaly. But the social and historical context in which he developed his work sets Gordon apart from these thinkers. The great twentieth-century Jewish philosophers mentioned above were all formally trained in various philosophical and religious schools of thought and held positions of academic or institutionally recognized religious authority. Aharon David Gordon, on the other hand, was largely an auto-didact<sup>1</sup> and is best known for his involvement as a philosopher and labor pioneer in the phase of Zionist immigration into the Land of Israel that took place from 1904 until the beginning of World War I known as the Second Aliyah.

The social and historical realities characteristic of the Second Aliyah and the Land of Israel at the beginning of the twentieth century make the appearance of a great philosopher in its midst a most surprising

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1 This, it should be noted, is true of many of the early twentieth-century Jewish thinkers who grew up in the Russian Pale of Settlement, such as M. J. Berdiczевsky, Hayyim Nachman Bialik, Shimon Dubnov, and Asher Ginzburg (Ahad Ha'am).

phenomenon. At that time, in the Land of Israel, there were no universities nor centers of philosophical discourse of any kind. Moreover, the pioneer laborers among whom Gordon lived and worked were dedicated to the material creation of a homeland and many of them rejected abstract intellectual pursuits as an expression of middle-class decadence.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, one of the aims of the present volume is to show that the inner attachment of Gordon's philosophical thought to this particular historical and social context provides the basis for an invaluable contribution to the navigation of problems facing Jewish and human existence in our own day.

I shall suggest, in the coming discussions, that the grounding of Aharon David Gordon's philosophy in the pioneering character of the Second Aliyah experience presented a unique opportunity in the history of Jewish thought because of the character of that community as a community that was built from scratch. Transplanting Hermann Cohen's concept of "origin" from the realm of his own neo-Kantian thought<sup>3</sup> to that of Gordon's understanding of "man in nature,"<sup>4</sup> one might say that the ethos of labor,

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- 2 See, for example, Y. Kolat, "The Idea of the University in the Jewish National Movement," in *The History of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem* [Heb.], ed. Shaul Katz and Michael Hed (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000), 3–74; and Zvi Shiloni, "Phases in the Development of Jewish Settlement in the Land of Israel during the Second Aliyah," in *The Second Aliyah* [Heb.], vol. 1, ed. Israel Bartal, Zev Tzahor, and Yehoshua Kniel (Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak ben Tzvi, 1997), 104–134.
  - 3 Hermann Cohen's concept of "origin" roots the logic of development in the mathematical sciences, ethics, and religion in the inner workings of an a priori universal reason. (For a succinct understanding of the concept in Cohen, see Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, trans. John Denton [Albany: SUNY, 1988], 90–97). We shall see that Gordon rejects this type of rational idealism since he roots even the workings of the human spirit in the self-creation of nature as experienced a-posteriori. And yet, the notion of origin plays a similar role in both in so far as both presume that the various aspects of human cognition, understanding and experience derive from a structure of being that precedes them.
  - 4 I place this term in quotation marks because of its centrality for all of Gordon's thought and its reflection in the title of Gordon's major philosophical essay "Man and Nature" (in Aharon David Gordon, *Selected Writings* [Heb.], ed. Eliezer Schweid [Jerusalem: Hasifriyah Hatzionit, 1982], 50–171. For English renditions, see A. D. Gordon, *Selected Essays*, trans. Frances Burnce [New York: League for Labor Palestine, 1938], 171–253. For a general history of the essay and its appearance see later on in this introduction.) Despite the problem of gender bias, I use the term "man" to translate the Hebrew *adam* in Gordon's writing, because this would have been the proper translation into English usage in Gordon's day, and particularly because Gordon's use of the Hebrew term refers to the concreteness of human existence, as lived, and not to the abstract or generalized idea of that existence, as would ordinarily be associated with the gender-neutral term "human." To translate *adam beteva* or *adam veteva* as "human and nature" or "human



characteristic of the Second Aliyah, represents the “origin” and “ground” of Gordon’s philosophy because of the real-life questions that such an original situation arouses, and because of the role played by labor as a community value in the pioneers’ collective struggle for life. The methodological significance of the Second Aliyah community being a settlement “from scratch” is that the trials and tribulations that faced the community were those that concerned survival and existence on the most fundamental level.

There is, of course, no such thing as building a community entirely *ex nihilo*. The pioneer community of the Second Aliyah was constructed in a particularly Jewish context. It was a community that knew very well from whence it came, but because its relation to the past was largely rebellious, it saw its future as entirely open-ended, and ultimately dependent upon its own initiative. Throughout this composition, I will be referring to the pioneering quality of Gordon’s thought, with respect to the value of human endeavor, on the backdrop of this open-endedness of spirit. I will suggest that it is as a result of the experience of building the community from its foundations that Gordon was able to develop a vision of human existence that served as a radical alternative to both the traditional Judaism left behind in the Shtetl, as well as to the various social, economic and cultural trajectories already established, in his time, in the modern West.

## Previous Scholarship and Direction of the Present Work

During his lifetime, Gordon influenced those around him mostly by the power and depth of his personality.<sup>5</sup> Even in the early years following his death, he was known mostly through anecdotes told by people who knew him directly.<sup>6</sup> But in time, there developed a tradition of rigorous scholarship that systematically considered various aspects of his thought.

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in nature,” rather than as “man and nature” or “man in nature,” would therefore be both overly cumbersome and somewhat misleading. In addition, it should be emphasized, the term *adam* (or man), in Gordon’s usage, refers explicitly to the concrete human being in its feminine aspects no less, and perhaps even more than to the masculine. (On this point see Einat Ramon, *A New Life: Religion, Motherhood, and Supreme Love in the Works of Aharon David Gordon* [Heb.] [Jerusalem: Carmel, 2007].)

5 See Yosef Aharonovitch, “Biographical Notes,” in Aharon David Gordon, *Nation and Labor* [Heb.], ed. Shmuel Hugo Bergman and Eliezer Shohat (Jerusalem: Hasifriyah Hatzionit, 1952), 65; and Shmuel Hugo Bergman, “A. D. Gordon’s Thought on Man and Nature,” in Bergman, *Men and Ways* [Heb.] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1967), 318.

6 Eliezer Schweid, *The Individual: The World of Aharon David Gordon* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 5720/1970), 7; Ramon, *New Life*, 27.

Surprisingly, some of the earliest writing on Gordon appeared in English as part of a 1932 doctoral dissertation at Columbia University.<sup>7</sup> An additional volume on Gordon's life and work was published in English in New York in 1964.<sup>8</sup> Though neither of these compositions had any lasting effect on the overall scholarship concerning Gordon's thought, I consider them significant for two reasons. First, they stand in sharp contrast to the situation that exists since the closing decades of the twentieth century, when aside from a number of essays written in English by Israeli scholars who do most of their work in Hebrew, no significant scholarship on Gordon's thought has been published for the English-speaking world. The fact that Gordon's work has lately suffered from scholarly neglect in English is significant with respect to the discussion that appears at the end of this volume concerning the relevance of his thought for the present. It demonstrates the changes that have occurred in relations between the various segments of world Jewry over the past century, and in the character of Jewish peoplehood more generally. Second, both of these compositions succeed in presenting many of the themes that were prevalent in Gordon's thought to the English-speaking world, albeit without reference to questions regarding its methodological character, as has become the norm for much of the literature in Hebrew.

The high road of scholarship on the thought of Aharon David Gordon begins with Shmuel Hugo Bergman's introductory essay to the second volume of a three-volume set of Gordon's works, published in 1940.<sup>9</sup> In this and other essays he wrote over the years, Bergman presented some of the central philosophical distinctions Gordon developed in his thought, such as those arising between cognitive understanding (*hakarah*) and life-experience (*havayah*) or between what he calls the expansion (*hitpashtut*) and contraction (*tzimtzum*) of self and experience. He showed how from these terms Gordon developed specific philosophical positions in the area of society, ethics, religion, and art, and compared various aspects of Gordon's

7 Shlomo Bardin, *Pioneer Youth in Palestine* (New York: Bloch, 1932), 58–91.

8 Herbert Rose, *The Life and Thought of A. D. Gordon: Pioneer, Philosopher, and Prophet of Modern Israel* (New York: Bloch, 1964).

9 This essay was reprinted in Bergman, *Man and Ways* (note 5 above). A shorter English version of Bergman's evaluation of Gordon's philosophy was translated from German into English as "A. D. Gordon: The Recovery of Cosmic Unity," in Samuel H. Bergman, *Faith and Reason: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought*, trans. Alfred Jospe (Washington D.C.: B'nei Brith Hillel Foundations, 1961), 98–120.

philosophy with those of more famous Western thinkers such as Herder, Bergson, and Jung.

A central aspect of Gordon's thought already presented in Bergman's essays, but methodically explicated only in the later scholarship, concerns its religious character. The present volume makes use of Bergman's identification of the "religious" with the "cosmic" in Gordon's thought, as a methodological premise for interpreting the wide variety of issues discussed in his many essays.

In his 1970 *The Individual: The World of A. D. Gordon*,<sup>10</sup> Eliezer Schweid rejected Bergman's comparison of Gordon with Western philosophers as the proper context in which his thought needs to be explicated. Though he dedicated the first chapters of the work to a presentation of the relevant biographical background, he quickly turned to a systematic explication of Gordon's primary philosophical concepts. He analyzed Gordon's positions regarding the relation between cognitive understanding and life experience as a full-blown epistemology, and between man and nature as a proper philosophical ontology that provides the form and substance for virtually all of Gordon's writings. In this context, Schweid offered the first systematic evaluation of the organic character of Gordon's social thought, focusing on relations between individual, family, community, and people or nation,<sup>11</sup> while demonstrating its inner connection to the Second Aliyah ethos of labor. Schweid was also the first to demonstrate that the relationship of Gordon's philosophy with more traditional Jewish sources is one of continuity, while emphasizing the creative freedom that this continuity allows in the present.

In the next generation of Gordon scholarship, Sara Strassberg-Dayán's 1995 publication, *Individual, Nation and Mankind*, builds upon the systematic form of Gordon's thought, already laid out in Schweid's work, in order to demonstrate the similarities that exist between Gordon's concept of man and that of his Land of Israel contemporary, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook.<sup>12</sup> In his 1996 book, *The Kabbalistic and Hasidic Sources of A. D. Gordon's*

10 See note 6 above.

11 In Gordon's writings, as in the writings of most East European Zionists, the term "nation" refers to groups that identify themselves as a shared ethnicity, and may be interchanged with the term "people," as in the Hebrew term *am*. But since Gordon also uses the terms *le'om*, and *umah*, which in contemporary English usage are sometimes translated as "nationality" or "nation," I will at times use the terms interchangeably.

12 Sara Strassberg-Dayán, *Individual, Nation and Mankind: The Conception of Man in the Teachings of A. D. Gordon and Rabbi Kook* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 1995).

*Thought*,<sup>13</sup> Avraham Shapira delves into the philological aspect of his debt to earlier forms of Jewish religiosity with a painstaking examination of his terminology drawn from Kabbalistic and Hassidic literature.

Einat Ramon's *A New Life: Religion Motherhood and Supreme Love in the Works of Aharon David Gordon*,<sup>14</sup> published in 2007, also examines the traditional and religious aspects of Gordon's thought, while breaking new ground through her application of feminist critique to Gordon's writings. Shalom Ratzabi, in his 2011 volume entitled *Anarchy in Zion*, expands on the influence of Gordon's philosophy of man in nature with regard to society and politics through a comparison with Martin Buber's dialogical philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

The importance of the above-mentioned scholarship for the present work is overwhelming. But the general direction of the present volume is that of a response to a more recent work on Gordon's thought that was dedicated specifically to a comprehensive delineation of Gordon's philosophical method. I am referring to a doctoral dissertation completed by Ehud Fuehrer in 2013.<sup>16</sup> There is much that I agree with in Fuehrer's work, particularly his claim that even though some important first steps have been made, the intricacies of Gordon's philosophical methodology have not to date been sufficiently explicated. I take exception, however, to his criticism of the poetic character of Gordon's writing and his subsequent attempt to "rescue" Gordon's method from his poetic style. This, I believe, is a severe mistake because it would mean a rejection of Gordon's fundamental understanding of the connection between philosophy and life.

Life, for Gordon, is worthy of philosophical consideration only because it is much more than an object of philosophy. For Gordon, life includes the dynamic movement of the natural cosmos in which the human being is born, and in which his or her self and personality develop. In addition, life, in Gordon's philosophy, constitutes the creative power through which a particular individual or community is realized.<sup>17</sup> As such, life itself provides the philosophical predisposition from which Gordon speaks. It is the stuff

13 Avraham Shapira, *The Hassidic and Kabbalistic Sources of A. D. Gordon's Thought* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996).

14 Ramon, *New Life*.

15 Shalom Ratzabi, *Anarchy in Zion: Between Martin Buber and A. D. Gordon* [Heb.] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2011).

16 Ehud Fuehrer, *New Man: A New Reading in A. D. Gordon's Philosophy* [Heb.] (Ramat Gan, Bar Ilan University Pub., 2019).

17 Many of the chapters in the present work are designed to demonstrate these claims.

that all of nature, all of existence, is made of, and like nature, it contains the power and the mystery of creation. His poetic style may be understood, in this context, as the expression of life when perceived in nature as continuous creation, rather than as concept or idea. To free Gordon of his poetical expression would therefore amount to freeing his philosophical consideration of the nature of human and worldly existence from the very occurrence of life that constitutes their reality.

## The Character of Gordon's Writings and Method

Generally speaking, Gordon's essays consist of two types that are not, in the end, all that different from each other.<sup>18</sup>

The first type includes essays he wrote and published with the intention of influencing the hierarchy of values, modes of thought, and programs for development of the new Jewish community that was, at that time, being established in the Land of Israel.<sup>19</sup> These essays touch on the function of literature in building a new society, education, the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language, the value of labor, communal settlement, and many other issues relevant to the social, cultural, and political agenda of the Second Aliyah community.

The second type features a more methodical discourse on largely philosophical issues. To this category belongs his primary philosophical

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18 English translations of some of Gordon's writings may be found in abridged form in *Selected Essays* (note 4 above). Since there are no other collections of Gordon's writings in English, wherever possible I reference *Selected Essays* in addition to the original Hebrew citation. It should be noted, however, that the translations included in *Selected Essays* are based upon an earlier Hebrew volume that was organized according to topic, and in which the original essays were not only shortened but portions of the essays were moved from their original context and joined with others according to the topical headings assigned to them in that collection. At times I adopted some of the language from the translated texts, but more often than not I either used my own translation or redid the translations found in *Selected Essays* so as to conform more precisely with the original Hebrew.

19 See, for example, "An Irrational Solution," in Gordon, *Selected Writings*, 178–191; "An Open Letter to Y. H. Brenner," *ibid.*, 192–198; "On the Clarification of our Idea From its Foundations," *ibid.*, 229–266 (also published in *Selected Essays*, 4–15); "Principles for the Bylaws of a Workers' Settlement," in *Selected Writings*, 304–314 (also published in *Selected Essays*, 263–267); and "On Our Accounting of Religion," in *Selected Writings*, 408–409 (also published in *Selected Essays*, 284–286). See also Gordon, *Nation and Labor*, 132–139; "On the Clarification of Our Position," *ibid.*, 215–232; and "Our Work from Now On," *ibid.*, 233–257 (also published in *Selected Essays*, 29–42).

essay, “Man and Nature,”<sup>20</sup> and to some extent, his “A Clarification of Our Fundamental Idea.”<sup>21</sup> “Man and Nature” is essentially a composition that was put together on the basis of the philosophical journal (including assorted notes found on scraps of paper) that Gordon wrote over the years after coming to the Land of Israel. We do not know when he wrote the specific passages in this journal. But the first section of the extensive essay known to contemporary scholars as “Man and Nature” was already published under this title in 1909.<sup>22</sup> “A Clarification of Our Fundamental Idea,” on the other hand, is an anti-Marxist polemic that he wrote following World War I, when a new wave of immigration, known as the Third Aliyah, brought to the Land of Israel a particularly doctrinaire, institutionally oriented, and militant form of Marxist ideology.<sup>23</sup>

The reason why these two types of writings are not that different from each other is that their topics often intersect. Even in those essays that directly respond to issues of public concern, Gordon roots his positions in the philosophical thinking that he developed most extensively in the texts that eventually formed the expanded version of “Man and Nature.” And the philosophical agenda of “Man and Nature” has as its goal the explanation and justification of Gordon’s perception of society and civilization, in a manner that has direct bearing on the practical issues that were discussed at the time of the Second and the beginning of the Third Aliyah.

What is important for us to consider in these introductory remarks, is that there is a strong connection, in Gordon’s writing, between philosophy, life, and praxis. As I will show, the interaction between these three provide the dynamic through which Gordon’s thought developed over the years into a comprehensive and methodically consistent philosophy. A detailed rendition of the development of Gordon’s thought remains for

20 Selected Writings, 49–171 (also published in *Selected Essays*, 171–253).

21 Selected Writings, 229–266 (also published in *Selected Essays*, 4–15).

22 It is important, therefore, to distinguish the later enlarged essay, sewn together by Bergman and Shoḥat (in *The Writings of A. D. Gordon in Three Volumes*, ed. Shmuel Hugo Bergman and Eliezer Shoḥat [Jerusalem: Hasifriyah Hatzionit, 5717]) from the shorter earlier one, which reappears as the first section of the longer version. Compare Schweid in *The Individual*, 63, and particularly Ramon, *New Life*, 25.

23 Because of the interweaving of the real-life oriented polemic with the fundamentals of Gordon’s overall philosophical worldview in this essay, Schweid believed that its extensive explication may serve as an excellent starting point for the study of Gordon’s thought in its entirety. For this reason, he returned to the study of Gordon’s thought and published a comprehensive evaluation of the essay in 2014. See Eliezer Schweid, *The Foundations and Sources of A. D. Gordon’s Philosophy* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2014).

future scholarship, insofar as it requires, among other things, a painstaking examination of the original form of his philosophical manuscripts and an attempt to date their various sections.<sup>24</sup>

General impressions of Gordon's published writings, nonetheless, appear to support the following two contentions. First, the parameters of his thought are determined by his inquiry into the character of human existence, nature, and the cosmos, alongside of his analyses of the practical issues facing the Second Aliyah community. Second, despite their inner consistency, Gordon's writings do not comprise a unified canon, but rather form an organic development of ideas starting from early philosophical intuitions that gestated over a period of time, with a turn to relative systematization, as a result of his need to respond to the growing complexity of practical challenges that faced the Second Aliyah pioneer community, in his later years.

## Structure and Goals of the Present Book

Shortly before his death in 1922, Gordon asked that in the future his works not be discussed or disseminated unless they are found to be of actual importance at the time. This is in line with his self-perception as an educator whose philosophical interest is pedagogical.<sup>25</sup>

In line with this statement, the present work will pursue two distinct goals. First, it will demonstrate the inner authenticity of Gordon's thought as a manifestation of the creative activity characteristic of the Second Aliyah. Second, it will offer the conception of life in Gordon's overall philosophy of man in nature, as the starting-point for a reconsideration of the fundamental problems of present-day Jewish existence and Western civilization.

Because of the scarcity of literature on Gordon's thought in English, a number of discussions in this book are intended as a broad presentation

24 Following submission of the present volume for publication, a critical edition of "Man and Nature," prepared by two Israeli scholars, Yuval Jobani and Ron Margolin (A. D. Gordon, *Man and Nature—Critical Edition* [Heb.] Jerusalem: Magnes, 2020) was released. This critical edition will hopefully make it possible for future scholarship to create a more detailed chronology of the development of Gordon's thought.

25 See Eliezer Schweid, "The Philosophical-Educational Structure of the Thought of A. D. Gordon," *Iyyun* [Heb.] 46 (1997): 393–414; and Yehoyada Amir, "Towards a Life of Expansion: Education as Religious Deed in A. D. Gordon's Philosophy," in *Abiding Challenges: Research Perspectives on Jewish education*, ed. Y. Rich and M. Rosenak (London: Freund, 1999), 19–63.

of the issues that Gordon philosophically confronted and his position on each. On this level of discussion, I shall show that the general character of Gordon's thought is best described, using contemporary terminology, as an ecological philosophy that understands all of existence in terms of a multivalent and yet interconnected and unified whole. I will show that from a philosophical perspective, Gordon's identification of nature with the totality of existence rests upon his belief in human life as a particular aspect of the organic character of nature as a living and breathing ecosystem. Most importantly, I will explicate the methodological implications of Gordon's primary philosophical intuition concerning the rootedness of the human self in the mysterious or hidden dimensions of natural creation, as an alternative to contemporary discourse, in a way that may prove to be critical in regard to the fate of humanity and the Jewish people in our time.



## Chapter II

# A Quest for Life: Historical and Biographical Background

The proper place to begin an evaluation of Gordon's overall philosophy is with its biographical and historical background. The establishment of a serious intellectual biography for Gordon is not possible since we do not have in our possession any of his writings prior to his emigration to the Land of Israel.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, we have enough selective information to piece together central aspects of his personality and some of the issues that concerned him during the first part of his life in the Russian Pale of Settlement, while there is quite a bit of collected material from which to draw a picture of Gordon's life and thought from the time he arrived in the Land of Israel in 1904.

### Early Life in the Pale of Settlement: 1856–1903

When Gordon was born in 1856, Alexander the II was the new Tsar of Russia. The decade of his birth saw a moderate turn toward liberalism in the Russian Empire. And as opposed to the later period, when Gordon emigrated to the Land of Israel, at the time of his birth there were still hopes

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<sup>1</sup> Based on testimony by Gordon's daughter, Yael, Einat Ramon writes: "If Gordon retained publications, manuscripts, diaries, letters or pictures, from the period before he migrated to the Land of Israel, these would have been stolen at the time the carriage he was riding in was held up by Arab bandits during his move from Judah to the Galilee in 1912." Ramon, *New Life*, 20.

for a Western-style civil reform.<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew literary movement known as the Haskalah, or Enlightenment, had slowly been developing since the beginning of the nineteenth century and held out much promise for the modernization of Jewish culture.<sup>3</sup> However, in Russia, industrialization would not begin in earnest for quite some time, and except for a small number of wealthy Jews, Jewish life was confined to the Pale of Settlement. Therefore, Jewish family and community life remained there, at least until the final third of the nineteenth century, relatively intact.

Gordon was born to a traditional Jewish family in the Ukrainian province of Podolia, which was open to the Enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> In his early childhood Gordon received a traditional upbringing, though except for a single year when, at the age of fourteen, he attended a yeshiva in Vilna, he did not have any significant formal education. Some of his education was through personal tutors and occasional stints to teachers in nearby towns.<sup>5</sup> Most of his learning, however, was autodidactic. In his adolescence, Gordon's family hired a private tutor who taught him Bible and Hebrew grammar. But by the time he was seventeen, Gordon developed a strong desire to learn languages and science. Within four years, with his parents' agreement, he learned Hebrew, Russian, German, and French, and began to read professional literature in the arts, sciences, and philosophy in each of these languages.

While Gordon remained a strictly observant Halakhic Jew, at least until his arrival in the Land of Israel in 1904, his Enlightenment sensibilities can

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2 Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe, 1772–1881*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005), 102–111.

3 See, for example: Shmuel Feiner, "The Pseudo-Enlightenment and the Question of Jewish Modernization," *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 1 (1996): 62–88; Eli Lederhandler, "Modernity Without Emancipation or Assimilation: the Case of Russian Jewry," in *Assimilation and Community*, ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven Zipperstein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 324–343; and Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe*, 90–101.

4 The little that is known today about Gordon's early life is mostly based upon the biographical sketch prepared by Yosef Aharonovitch for the first collection of Gordon's writings. Aharonovitch was a close friend of Gordon's. He was also the first editor of the *Hapo'el Hatza'ir* newspaper, in which Gordon published many of his essays. His biographical sketch on Gordon was partially based upon the testimony of Gordon's daughter Yael, partially on things he heard directly from Gordon, himself, and partially on things that he heard in his youth when he lived in the same area of the Ukraine as Gordon (Aharonovitch, "Biographical Notes," 72).

5 Aharonovitch, "Biographical Notes," 56 (and compare Rose, *The Life and Thought of A. D. Gordon*, 36).

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